



## GRAM COURSE NO. 5: SHAKESPEARE

Continuing our series of pre-final exam courses, today we take up the works of William Shakespeare (or "The Bard of Avon" as he is popularly called).

First let us examine the persistent theory that Shakespeare (or "The Pearl of the Antilles" as he is affectionately referred to) is not the real author of his plays. Advocates of this theory insist that the plays are so full of classical allusions and learned references that they couldn't possibly have been written by the son of an illiterate country butcher.

To which I reply, "Faugh!" Was not the great Spinoza's father a humble woodcutter? Was not the immortal Isaac Newton's father a simple second baseman? (The elder Newton, incidentally, is one of history's truly pathetic figures. He was, by all accounts, the greatest second baseman of his time, but baseball, alas, had not yet been invented.) It used to break young Isaac's heart to see his father get up every morning, put on uniform, spikes, glove, and cap, and stand alertly behind second base, bent forward, eyes narrowed, waiting, waiting, waiting. That's all—waiting. Isaac loyally sat in the bleachers and yelled, "Good show, Dad!" and stuff like that, but everyone else in town used to snigger and pelt the Newtons with over-ripe fruit—figs for the elder Newton, apples for the younger. Thus, as we all know, the famous occasion came about when Isaac Newton, struck in the head with an apple, leapt to his feet, shouted, "Europa!" and announced the third law of motion: "For every action there is an opposite and equal reaction!"

(How profoundly true those simple words are! Take, for example, Marlboro Cigarettes. Light one. That's the action. Now what is the reaction? Pleasure, delight, contentment, cheer, and comfort! And why such a happy reaction? Because you have started with a happy cigarette—a felicitous blend of jolly tobaccos, a good-natured filter, a rellicking flip-top box, a merry soft pack. As Newton often said, "You begin with better makin's, you end with better smokin's." Small wonder

they called him "The Swedish Nightingale!").

But I digress. Back to Shakespeare (or "The Gem of the Ocean" as he was ribaldly appellationed).

Shakespeare's most important play is, of course, *Hamlet* (or *Macheth*, as it is sometimes called). This play tells in living color the story of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, who one night sees a ghost upon the battlements. (Possibly it is a goat he sees; I have a first folio edition that is frankly not too legible.) Anyhow, Hamlet is so upset by seeing the ghost (or goat) that he stabs Polonius and Rare Rodkin. He is thereupon banished to a leather factory by the King, who cries, "Get thee to a tannery!" Thereupon Ophelia refuses her food until Laertes shouts, "Get thee to a beaunery!" Ophelia is so miffed that she chases her little dog out of the room, crying, "Out,



out damned 'spot!' She is fined fifty shillings for swearing, but Fortin, in an eloquent plea, gets the sentence commuted to life imprisonment. Thereupon King Lear and Queen Mah proclaim a festival—complete with amateur theatricals, kissing games, and a pie-eating contest. Everyone has a perfectly splendid time till Banquo's ghost (or goat) shows up. This so unhinges Richard III that he drowns his cousin, Butt Malnoey. This leads to a lively discussion during which everyone is killed. The little dog Spot returns to utter the immortal curtain lines:

*Alack, the play forthwith was end and oddy, But he of cheer—there's Marlboro in the lobby!*

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As the slings and arrows of outrageous finals loom closer, perchance the makers of Marlboro are not untoward to offer this friendly suggestion: Get thee to a library!

